

## Size Does Matter – When Choosing A Life Jacket

There's no doubt that life jackets save lives. In the United States an average of nine people a day die as a result of drowning - deaths that could have been prevented. But a life jacket that does not fit properly can put a person at risk of drowning. Proper fit is imperative for safety on the water. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary has a few tips to follow when choosing a life jacket.

- Choose only a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) approved life jacket, and the correct size for the weight of the person. The USCG stamp of approval, size, whether it is for a child or an adult, and appropriate weight of the wearer should be listed inside the jacket. A person's chest size and stomach size may come into play when selecting the right life jacket.
- Use the "touchdown" test to see if your life jacket fits properly; Lift your arms above your head as if calling a touchdown. The chest portion of the jacket should not touch your chin when you look left, right or over your shoulder. If the jacket passes this test, it most likely fits. If possible try it out in shallow water. The life jacket should not ride up on your body. However, ride-up may happen if your stomach is larger than your chest.
- Weigh a child and measure for chest size under the arms before shopping for a child's life jacket. A properly fitting jacket should be snug but not tight.
- Check for proper fit of a life jacket on a child. Wearing the jacket, the child should stand normally with arms at his or her sides. Grab the jacket at the shoulders and firmly lift up. The jacket does not fit if it moves more than three inches up and down the child's body during the test.
- Ensure a life jacket for an infant or child has a crotch strap to help keep the life jacket on, an oversized float collar to help keep the head out of the water and a grab loop for easier water rescue. All straps should be intact and fastened at all times.

So what is the safest life jacket? In terms of risk of drowning, the safest life jacket is the one you're willing to wear! There are many good choices to keep safe on the water. Some of the choices are a better for certain situations than others, and therefore the choices are explained in the "Think Safe" life jacket pamphlet that is sold with every US Coast Guard approved life jacket. By reading the pamphlet, you can understand how to safely have fun on the water. For more information about life jacket types visit <http://www.safeboatingcampaign.net/types.htm> or <http://www.boatingsidekicks.com/lifejackets.htm>.

So what about the cost aren't life jackets expensive? Just keep in mind that no one thinks about the cost when they are in the water! The value of a life jacket could be priceless.